

**WASHINGTON, DC (January 11, 2013)** – Reps. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) and Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, released the following statements today after reports of The Council of Foundations' agreement to return 190 hectares of forestland to the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary in İstanbul.

*Congressman Bilirakis:* "I welcome the Government of Turkey's positive gesture, returning the forestland around the Halki Seminary to the Aya Triada Monastery Foundation, but also call on it to facilitate the return of all confiscated property to its rightful owner. Additionally, I reiterate my call for the immediate reopening of the Halki Seminary with no preconditions, so it may train future generations of Orthodox clergy. The Ecumenical Patriarch, as the leader of nearly 300 million Orthodox Christians, is known for his efforts to achieve peace and reconciliation among all faiths and has fostered dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims. I hope yesterday's announcement is the first step to the Government of Turkey's recognition of rights for all of its citizens and institutions."

*Congresswoman Maloney:* "This restoration of forestland to the Greek Orthodox Halki (Heybeliada) Seminary shows a great step forward by the Turkish government. As the co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, I hope the Ecumenical Patriarchate continues to gain back property that has been occupied by Turkey for far too long. While this is progress, it is but a step and I hope to see more property rightfully returned."

###